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ADDRESS
TO THE
ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,
DELIVERED AT
THE ANNIVERSARY MEETING
ON THE 27TH MAY 1853,
BY
SIR B. C. BRODIE, BART., D.C.L., F.R.S.,
PRESIDENT.

OUR accomplished Secretary will give you some account of the principal additions which have been made to our knowledge of Ethnology in the course of the last year, a task for the performance of which he is far better qualified than I am. But previously to his doing so I beg leave to occupy your time, for a few minutes, by offering some general observations illustrative of the objects for which this Society has been instituted. These objects are neither few nor unimportant. The subject is one of the highest interest to the philosopher; at the same time that, if the inquiry be properly directed, and the results properly applied, it will be found to be not less deserving the attention of the moralist and the statesman.

Mankind, scattered as they are over the entire surface of the globe; located among the perpetual snows of the Arctic regions, and in the perpetual summer of the Equator; on mountains and in forests; in fertile valleys and in deserts; in lands of rain and tempests; and in those which are never or rarely blessed by descending showers—are presented to us under a vast variety of aspects, differing from each other, not only as to their external form, but also as to their moral qualities and intellectual capacities. The first question which presents itself to him who is entering on that extensive field of observation which Ethnology

Sir B. C. Brodie's *Anniversary Address*.

affords is, Do these beings, apparently so different from each other, really belong to one and the same family? are they descended from one common stock? or are they to be considered as different genera and species, descended from different stocks, and the result of distinct and separate creations? Those to whose opinions on the subject we may refer with the greatest confidence—among whom I may more especially mention our own countrymen, Mr. Lawrence, Dr. Prichard, and Dr. Latham—have come to the conclusion that the different human races are but varieties of a single species; and without entering into all the arguments which have been adduced by these philosophers, I may observe that there are many facts which seem, as it were, to lie on the surface, and which are obvious to us all, that may lead us to believe that this conclusion is well founded.

Although we justly regard the intellectual faculties as of a higher order than those which belong to mere animal life; although it is as to these alone that mankind “*propius accedunt ad Deos*,” yet it must be admitted, that up to a certain point, and within its own domain, instinct is a more unerring guide than human reason. And what is it but instinct which leads us at once to recognise the Esquimaux, the Negro, the Hottentot, as belonging to the same order of beings with ourselves, with as little hesitation as the greyhound, the spaniel, the mastiff, mutually recognise each other as being of the same kindred?

Then be it observed, that, however different may be the external figure, the shape of the head, and limbs, there is no real difference as to the more important parts of the system, namely, the brain, the organs of sense, the thoracic and abdominal viscera; and the medical student is aware that he obtains all the knowledge which he requires just as well from the dissection of the Negro or the Lascar as from that of the Anglo-Saxon or the Celt. Even as to the skeleton, the difference is more apparent than real: there is the same number, form, and arrangement of the bones; and, I may add, there is the same number, form, and arrangement of the muscles.

Pursuing the inquiry further still, we find that the different sexes are mutually attracted to each other; that their union is prolific; that the period of gestation in the female is the same in all; and that—unlike what happens as to hybrid animals—instead

of stopping short after one or two generations, their offspring continues to be prolific ever afterwards.

Nor is there any thing difficult to understand, nor contrary to the analogy of what happens among other animals, in the production of the different varieties of mankind. The Hottentot and the Anglo-Saxon have a closer resemblance to each other than the mastiff and the spaniel. How different is the Leicestershire from the South-down breed of sheep; and the English dray-horse from the thorough-bred Arabian. We see these changes actually going on, nay, we actually produce them artificially among our domesticated animals; and we see them taking place, to a certain extent, even in our own species. The Negroes, taken from on board the captured slave-ships and transported to Jamaica, have a different aspect from those who have been for some generations domesticated in the service of the planters. The descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race transplanted, within the last two centuries, to other regions of the globe, are already beginning to be distinguishable from those who remain in the parent country by their external appearance, and, even to a greater extent, by their characters and habits. It was observed to me by a gentleman who has served his country in important official situations in Europe and on the other side of the Atlantic ocean, that if, in going from England to Italy, he was struck with the comparative passiveness of the Italians, on returning to England from America he found something still more remarkable in the passiveness of the English compared with the excitement and activity observable among the citizens of the United States. If in the present condition of the world, when there is so free an intercourse among its inhabitants, and so constant an intermixture of races, such changes are to a certain extent going on, it is easy to conceive that changes still more remarkable might have taken place when human society was in its infancy; when nations were separated by impassable seas and mountains; when there was nothing to interfere with the influence of climate, food, and mode of life on the physical and moral character; and when repeated intermarriages among individuals of the same tribe were favourable to the transmission of accidental peculiarities of structure to succeeding generations.

There was a period when a jealousy prevailed of studies such as those of the Geologist and Ethnologist, from a supposition that

they in some degree tended to contradict the revelations of the earliest of our sacred volumes. The advancement of knowledge has shewn that such jealousy was without any just foundation; and those who on such narrow grounds stand aloof from the pursuits of science are now reduced to a small and almost unnoticed minority. It is, however, satisfactory to find that the inquiries of the Ethnologist, so far from being opposed to, actually offer a strong confirmation of, the Mosaic records as to the origin of mankind having been from one parent stock, and not from different creations.

“ The noblest study of mankind is man.”

So says one of our greatest moralists and poets: and if we estimate them according to the rule which is here laid down, it must be admitted that inquiries into the physical, intellectual, and moral character of the various human races ought to hold a high rank among the sciences which claim the attention of the philosopher. Standing, as it were, midway between the physical and the moral sciences, Ethnology is not less interesting to the Naturalist than to the Metaphysician; and not less so to the Metaphysician than to the Philologist. To trace the influence of climate, of food, of government, and of a multitude of other circumstances, on the corporeal system, on the intellect, the instincts, and the moral sentiments, is the business of the Ethnologist: nor is it less in his department to trace the origin and construction of language generally, and the relation of different languages to each other. Infused into it, Ethnology gives a more philosophical character to history; adding to the dry and often painful detail of political events occurring in a particular country another series of facts, which present to us the whole of the human inhabitants of the globe as one large family, constituting one great system, advancing together towards the fulfilment of one great purpose of the Creator.

But in this utilitarian age there are, I doubt not, some who regard Ethnology as offering matter for curious speculation, but as being in no degree worthy of a place among those sciences which admit of a direct and practical application to the wants of society and the ordinary business of life. It is, indeed, with some among us too much the custom to measure things by this low

standard, and to forget that whatever adds to our stores of knowledge, and gives us broader views of the universe, tends to the improvement of the intellect, the elevation of the moral sentiments, and thus leads to a more complete development of those qualities by which the human species is justly proud of being distinguished from the inferior parts of the animal creation. The practical genius of the English is essentially different from the genius of the ancient Greeks; but no one can hesitate to believe that the philosophers, the poets, the architects, the sculptors, who form the glory of that wonderful people, are even now exercising a most beneficial influence on the character of mankind, after the lapse of more than 2000 years. Setting aside, however, these considerations, and admitting that it affords us no assistance in the construction of steam-engines or railways; that it is of no direct use in agriculture or manufactures; still it may be truly said, that, even according to his own estimate of things, the most thorough utilitarian who looks beyond the present moment will find that there is no science more worthy of cultivation than Ethnology. Is there any thing more important than the duties of a statesman? and can there be any more mischievous error than that of applying to one variety of the human species a mode of government which is fitted only for another? Yet how often, and even in our own times, from a want of the necessary knowledge and foresight on the part of those to whom the affairs of nations are entrusted, has this error been committed. Even within the narrow limits of our own island there are two races having each of them their peculiar character. But the British empire extends over the whole globe. It comes in contact with the descendants of the French in Canada; with the Red Indians of America; with the Negroes of Sierra Leone and Jamaica; with the Caffres and Hottentots of South Africa; with the manly, warlike, and intelligent inhabitants of New Zealand; with the rude Aborigines of Australia; with the Malays, the Hindoos, the Mussulmans, the Parsees, the Chinese in the East—races differing widely from ourselves, and not less widely from each other. Surely much advantage would arise, and many mistakes might be avoided, if those who have the superintendence and direction of the numerous colonies and dependencies of the British crown would condescend to qualify themselves for the task which they

have undertaken by studying the peculiarities of these various races, and by seeking that information on these subjects which Ethnology affords.

This Society is yet in its infancy. But those who have attended its Meetings will bear testimony to the value of the written communications which have been made to it during the present Session, and of the discussions to which these communications have led. Seeing how much has been already accomplished, and the zeal which exists among its members, I am, I conceive, not too sanguine in my expectations, when I anticipate that the Ethnological Society will from year to year advance in reputation and usefulness; and that the time is not far off when, its labours, and the objects which it has in view, being justly appreciated by the public, it will be ranked among the most important Scientific Institutions of the age.